

Only Kids Need Castles by **Ryomou**

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Summary: There are times when Will feels like he's missed his entire childhood

Only Kids Need Castles

There are times when Will feels like he's missed his entire childhood. He knows that's not the case—three years isn't his entire life, but he's missed more than his friends have. There weren't any adventures for him, no bonding moments, no shoulders to cry on in all that time.

First, it was him trapped, alone, and cold, and so afraid in the Upside Down. Then, feeling like he was strapped to a meteor hurtling towards Earth at the mercy of the Mind Flayer. And now, this. Whatever this is. This wrongness in Hawkins, because there's always something wrong. His life has turned into an endless cycle of 'fight for your life', 'can't sleep/don't sleep', 'night terrors', 'unprompted fear'.

There are times when Jonathan, the person he trusts most in the entire world, will come up behind him to ruffle his hair or pat him on the back, and Will's heart will just about jump out of his chest in terror. He wants to go backwards, before dating was a thing, and the stupid Starcourt Mall, before Max and El, as much as he likes them, and before the Demogorgon. He wants to go back to Mike's basement and playing D&D for ten hours straight. He wants to go back to being a kid. To being safe.

He misses his friends.

Most of all, he kind of misses Mike not being a complete and total dick.

"It's not my fault you don't like girls!"

Will feels like he's been slapped. It sounds like something Troy would say when they were younger, when he would tease Will for being a fag. It doesn't matter if it's true, the words sting all the same. It was a secret he had told Mike in confidence; one that only he knew. People suspected, sure, but only Mike *really* knew.

For what it's worth, Mike really does look sorry.

"I'm not trying to be a jerk, okay? But we're not kids anymore."

And Will wishes he could say that he wants to be. That he never got to be. That he missed it all and he wants to go *back*, please, let him go *back*.

"I mean, what did you think, really? That we were never gonna get girlfriends? That we were just gonna sit in my basement all day and play games for the rest of our lives?"

There are so many things Will wants to say. That he thought Mike would understand he couldn't stand to be alone after everything that happened. That he expected his friends to be there for him. That D&D is the only way he knows how to escape the stupid hell his life has suddenly become. But his eyes are starting to sting with tears and if there is one thing Mike does not deserve anymore, it's seeing him cry.

"Yeah, I guess I did. I really did."

The rain is pouring harder than before, but Will doesn't care. He jumps on his bike and peddles out of the garage, barely able to see the car in the driveway in front of him. It doesn't matter. He just wants to get home. Away from his stupid friends. Away from stupid Mike, who's shouting behind him.

"Will. Will! Will, come on!"

Fuck Mike.

The ride home is miserable. The tread on his tires is wearing thin and every now and then he goes into a skid that nearly sends him into a fall. He's soaked down to the skin, hair plastered to his face, everything inside his backpack probably ruined. His blood runs cold around Mirkwood like it always does, just out of habit, and he bypasses his house in favor of Castle Byers.

Will drops his bike out front, turns on the lantern inside, and collapses on the bed with a snuffle. It's cold, and leaky, and his heart still feels heavy with sorrow and betrayal. He eyes the countless comics in the space that is gradually becoming smaller and smaller. He examines the drawings on the wall—depictions of Will the Wise and all the characters of their campaign. He even has pictures of them together, from Halloween and years before and suddenly Will

feels stupid. The tears he tried so hard not to shed and Mike's house come spilling out. He knows they can't stay kids forever. But he had hoped, even if it was just for one day, that they could pretend. They could just pretend that things were the way that they used to be. He could pretend to be happy and unafraid, he could pretend to be loved and pretend to matter the way that he used to.

Things are different now though, and there's no changing that. It's time to grow up.

Mike is right.

They aren't kids anymore.

"Stupid....stupid..." muttering to himself, Will shreds the picture in his hands before moving to everything on the walls, ripping drawings and photographs down with fervor.

Only kids need castles to keep them safe, Will thinks, grabbing the bat in the corner.

Just like it was built, Castle Byers goes down, piece by piece.